

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN NIGERIA

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CHAPTER ONE GENERAL INTRODUCTION

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN NIGERIA

**Manasseh Udo, Mbosowo Udok, John Orioha and
Clifford Udosen**

The need for social transformation has always been the concern of people globally. This has at various times attracted different policy-makers, politicians and businessmen and women to discuss on how to transform the society. For instance, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were eight international development goals for the year 2015 that had been established following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000. It is an example of an attempt by world leaders to transform the world. All 191 United Nations member states at that time, and at least 22 international organizations, committed to help achieve the following Millennium Development Goals by 2015: to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; to achieve universal primary education; to promote gender equality and empower women; to reduce child mortality; to improve maternal health; to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; to ensure environmental sustainability; and to develop a global partnership for development ("United Nations Millennium Development Goals"). Within the expiration of the time earmarked for the MDGs, the global community has also come up with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including those

related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice. The goals are to be achieved by 2030. These show that social transformation is a global necessity and as such the theological education should not be left out in such a pursuit.

Social transformation which deals with “the process of change in institutionalized relationships, norms, values, and hierarchies over time” (“What is Social Transformation?”) is not just a global phenomenon. The Nigerian government has also attempted and continues in its efforts towards social transformation. For instance, Nigerian leaders both past and present have always called for social transformation although the name and the approach may be different. Former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan tagged the 2012 national budget and his manifesto as “Transformational Agenda” (Aye n.p); while President Mohammed Buhari has maintained his “change mantra.” This shows that social transformation has been of national concern. However, the approaches adopted by the leaders have not yielded the needed results because there is a need of multifaceted approaches to tackle the issue; hence, the necessity of this book, “Theological Education and Social Transformation in the Twenty-First Century.”

The FTE Guide to Theological Education broadly defines theological education as the “preparation — intellectual, experiential and spiritual — for serving and leading a church or community of faith” (8). Essien Ukpabio Presbyterian Theological College, Itu (An Affiliante of the University of Calabar) is one of the theological Colleges owned by the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria. It was established in 1994. However, prior to that time the premises had served as a leper colony and in 1984 it became a centre for the training of

evangelists and lay preachers for the church. The College’s diploma was initially affiliated to the University of Uyo. However, in 2010 the National University Commission approved the affiliation of the College with the University of Calabar for the award of Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in Religious and Cultural Studies. Following some preliminary visits of National University Commission, the College received full accreditation in 2017. Theological education in EUPTCI has three major areas of focus although they are closely related. There are:

a. Ministerial Formation: This is one of the main focuses of the theological education for theological education originally aimed at the preparation of people for ministry. Hence, theological education teaches people the history and doctrine of the church and how to handle the sacraments, conduct a worship, lead in public prayers, conduct marriages, and discharge pastoral duties. Ministry formation is more than simply learning what the Church teaches. Through ministerial formation, the person grows not only in knowledge, but in faith, discipleship, personhood and skills.

b. Spiritual Formation: According to Lawrenz, “spiritual formation is a conscious and deliberate release of oneself to Christ” (15). He maintains that “therefore, spiritual formation is more of a relationship; nor is it a run-of-the-mill affair; its motive is not to produce a spiritual stratification among church members, but to respond appropriately to each person’s level of readiness for growth” (11). Spiritual formation aims at the transformation of the human person into the image of Christ.

Mulholland defines spiritual formation as “the process by which a believer confirms by faith and action to the Lordship of Christ which eventually lead others to emulate Christ” (15).

By this definition, spiritual formation is not just automatic but a gradual and continuous process that is both action and inaction based. It is not just a mere confession both an embodied spirituality. Elizabeth Bolaji defines spiritual formation as “the intentional process by which the marks of an authentic Christian spirituality are formed and integrated” (11). This implies that it is not just about the formation of Christian spirituality but living an integral lifestyle. According to Bolaji, “such intentional efforts that are needed to form one’s spiritual life include: having private time with God (Quiet Time); studying and meditating on the Bible; fellowshiping with other believers; engaging in personal or family retreats; and observing fasting and prayer” (11). The above definitions suggest that spiritual formation is an on-going spiritual exercise with the aim of becoming like Jesus Christ in one’s day to day lifestyle, both in the public and in the private.

c. Academic Formation: Under this, theological education aims at the intellectual exploration of the Bible and sacred tradition and the integration of other arts and sciences with the substance of faith. It exposes the students to religious traditions other than the students’ own tradition and some other courses such as World Religions, Anthropology of Religion, Psychology of Religion, Citizenship Education, Philosophy and Logic and other General Studies (GST) courses.

John Stott, in commenting on the Lausanne statement on “Christian Social Responsibility”, suggests that “it is our duty to be involved in socio-political action; that is, both in social action (caring for society’s casualties) and in political action (concerned for the structures of society itself)” (Brown). This shows that it is an abounding duty on the Church and theological education to be an agent of social transformation. In

the light of this, the big question is how has theological education contributed to social transformation? This is the question that has been answered in the following articles published in this book.

This volume is a collection of essays by renowned scholars of theology and religion. These scholars have been key players in the ministerial, academic and spiritual formations of students in the theological education and in this volume they have responded to the issue of theological education and social transformation in Nigeria based on their area of specialization and current research interest.

Chapter two by Eno-Abasi Urua FNALdeals with the Silver Jubilee/ Convocation lecture. The lecturer and author is of the opinion that education is an important means of socialization...transformation and positive change. She goes on to say that theological education aims at equipping pastors, evangelists and lay people for the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ. Church renewal, evangelism and mission consciousness, effective pastoral ministry and commitment to Christian unity in the changing world are indexes of efficient engagement in theological education. In doing this, she draws her inferences from Essien Ukpabio Presbyterian Theological College, Itu and her proprietor, the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria.

In chapter three, Mbosowo B. Udok in his article titled, “The Value of Theological Education in the Church and Society” argues that theological institutions exist yet it worth is displaced. There is no doubt that sometimes the Christian intellectual tradition is thought of as a source of theological controversies and therefore of disunity. He maintains that this thought for centuries has aggravated the disregard for the value

of theological education in both the Church as an institution and the society. The chapter further argues that despite the assumed controversial nature of theological education, through a liberal axiological approach to theological education, certain ecclesiastical issues could be brought under control, thereby restoring the spiritual wholesomeness and intellectual revival of the Christian community. The paper concluded that the growth of the Christian community is determined by the level of appraisal of theological education and its worth in our society. To this end, the paper therefore recommends that the church and the Government should embark on an intellectual re-engineering of our theological institutions towards positive attitude concerning its value and worth in our society and the church in particular.

In chapter four, Dr Moses S. Edem dwells more on a fresh approach towards the domestication of Jesus Christ in Africa using the Ibibio people as a case study. He adopted contextualization as a method and argues that in domesticating Jesus for social transformation in Africa, we aim at removing those western clothes or mask from Jesus and put on him the African clothes with African philosophy grounded in African cultures and values.

Chapter five by Emmanuel William Udoh discusses how an understanding of Church leadership and governance can be a panacea for spiritual and social transformation in Nigeria. The author attempts to examine the nature of and the various forms of church leadership in order to encourage Christian leaders to re-examine their functions as people who hold the mantle of authority for ecclesiastical governance, and to propose Bible based leadership styles that will bring about the social transformation of the church. The research suggests a reversal to

a Bible based leadership style both in selection, qualification, and responsibility. According to the author, by so doing the church will experience growth and peace in the coming years; he further maintains that with the increase in level of human needs and problems the church needs to adopt a proactive leadership and governing principles in order to meet the challenges of the people.

In chapter six, Elijah Obinna focuses on “Where are you, God? An Interrogation of Suffering and Divine Providence in Nigeria”. This chapter provides a sociological and theological response to suffering, paying close attention to the Nigerian situation. Using a pastoral approach, the paper further makes a case for the church’s prophetic and Reformed witness in the face of suffering as evident within Nigeria. The overriding argument is that God’s sovereignty over creation means that creation, and particularly humanity, finds its existence, its being, its meaning and purpose, and its life and death in the eternal and good will and work of God often mirrored through the actions of God’s people.

John Chima Orioha in chapter seven argues that the Nigerian church has witnessed a high level of spiritual activities ranging from prayers, fasting and others which aim at the actualization of the will of God for the people. However, in the midst of such a high level of spirituality, there is the challenge of social injustice within and outside of the rank and file of the church. The church continuous to witness the marginalization of women, cases of child-abuse, economic injustice as some of its workers are indiscriminately paid, tribalism and ethnocentrism. Using Isaiah 58:1-12, he attempted to develop a theology of social justice. He affirms that humankind is living in a web of

interconnectedness and interdependence established through the covenant.

Bassey Obio in chapter eight raises a critical question as to whether the church can salvage the nation. The paper is his response to Prof. Yemi Osinbajo's statement in an ecumenical gathering that only God through the Church can salvage Nigeria from its quagmire occasioned by endemic corruption, poverty and injustices. His article aimed at identifying the role of the churches in tackling poverty and injustices in Nigeria especially through modern ecumenical approach. It x-rays the poverty and injustices index in Nigeria, the ecumenical efforts toward tackling this trend and proposal for a more holistic and robust ecumenical intervention in Nigeria's poverty and social injustices.

In chapter nine, Clifford William Udosen and Divine Nwanchege Kalu have investigated how the Jewish concept of justice can help in social transformation. The chapter calls the attention of Nigerians towards identifying some helpful lessons from Judaic concept of justice. They argue that the Jewish concept of social justice is very useful because the Jewish concept of justice contains ideological guides for rectifying social injustices in multi-cultural societies like the Nigerian federation.

Ukoha N. Ukoha in chapter ten investigates whether there is any Christian equivalent of the Islamic *zakat*. The subject matter focuses on the Islamic *zakat*. However, because the subject of *zakat* is very wide, his study is limited to the aspect whereby a veritable platform will be used to advocate for healthy Christian-Muslim Relations. He argues that the proper understanding and practice of *zakat* will possibly galvanize the people locally to promote social justice oriented ventures by

alleviating the sufferings of the less privileged as well as bridging the gap between the rich and the poor. This study will also aim to promote ideas that will to rekindle the goals and objectives of the Ministry of Social Welfare in Ebonyi State as well as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE). Some of the aspects of the concept of *zakat* are aimed to be projected as a boost to the ongoing campaign for resource generation and fiscal allocation at the National level.

In chapter eleven, Dr Eno Nathaniel Afia argues that marriage in African Traditional Religion is a very complex and important relationship, cutting across religion, politics, ethics, sociology, and economics among others. It is the focus of human existence, for marriage in African context, provides a contact point for the member of the community to meet together, whether the departed, the living and those yet that unborn. One who is not married among the Ibibio people goes against the norms of the community. In this paper, he maintains that traditional marriage and family is a nucleus for social transformation using a case study of Ibibio people.

In chapter twelve, Moses Sunday Edem and Divine N. Kalu from a Comparative Religion perspective wrote on "The Notion of Family in Confucianism: A Model for Social Stability and Order". The concern of the paper is that the notion of family in Confucianism is a viable model for social stability and order. This paper argues that, for a society to be stabled and properly ordered, there must be a sense of sound moral qualities and firm adherence of societal codes of conduct among its citizens. In such a society, there will be a state of equilibrium, an enduring or permanent order in society, especially, in the face of conditions capable of changing things and bringing instability. Such a society will also experience tranquility and freedom from

either inward disturbance or worry. Regrettably, our societies, in many senses lack such experiences. This is because many of the society's citizens do not wholly keep to the ethical norms of the society. While scholars and religious analysts have proposed different measures to curbing the various forms of instabilities in the society, this paper plays the same role. In doing so, it applies religious therapy, specifically, the notion of family in religion. That is, it explores the roles of the family in the society, as prescribed by religion, and raises implications of such roles for social stability and order. The idea of family is one of the themes that are mostly present in the teachings of world religions. Notably, the paper explores the concept of family in the Confucian perspective. Having identified helpful teachings in Confucianism, particularly on its notion of family, it sets it (Confucian ethics) as a model for social stability and order. Using the theory of structural functionalism to buttress this assertion, their paper adopts library method wherein there is textual analysis and conceptualization of thoughts. Thus the paper asserts that, the society, in pursuit for social stability and order can learn from Confucian teachings, especially its notion of family. It recommends that individual, families, groups, organizations, and the society at large should learn and pay attention to the teachings, especially, on the place of the family in achieving social stability and order.

Chapter thirteen by Clement Usen Eton is titled, "The Role of Theological Education in the Religio-cultural Transformation of the Oku Iboku Traditional Religious System". He argues that the problem of attitudes and beliefs cannot be easily compromised with since there are psychological influences involved in ascertaining, why people behave the way they do. Neither can theological education be

complete without the socialization of people and their belief in God (Ultimate reality), which is practically visible in the lived life of any given people. The gap this chapter seeks to fill is to modernize the traditional African system of communalism, by embracing the roles theological education play which can bring about social transformation of the already destroyed moral conscience in the culture of the community.

Chapter fourteen, the last chapter, the author Solomon B. Ekpe looks inwardly towards the church as he highlights the implications of investiture from the Presbyterian perspective. He frowns that the church leaders who are expected to champion morality in the society have become victims of various moral scandals. According to him, today we hear about cases of immoralities, divorces/breaking of matrimonial homes, embezzlement of Church funds, lack of love among Christians including some Church leaders and others such evils that should not be heard of among God's people. It is on this premise that his paper attempts to find out what could possibly be responsible for this infidelity. The paper, therefore, raises some suggestions as way foreword to help check these anomalies as to redeem the image of their ministries in particular and the entire Church in general.

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